

ST. RITA'S CHURCH

West Webster, New York



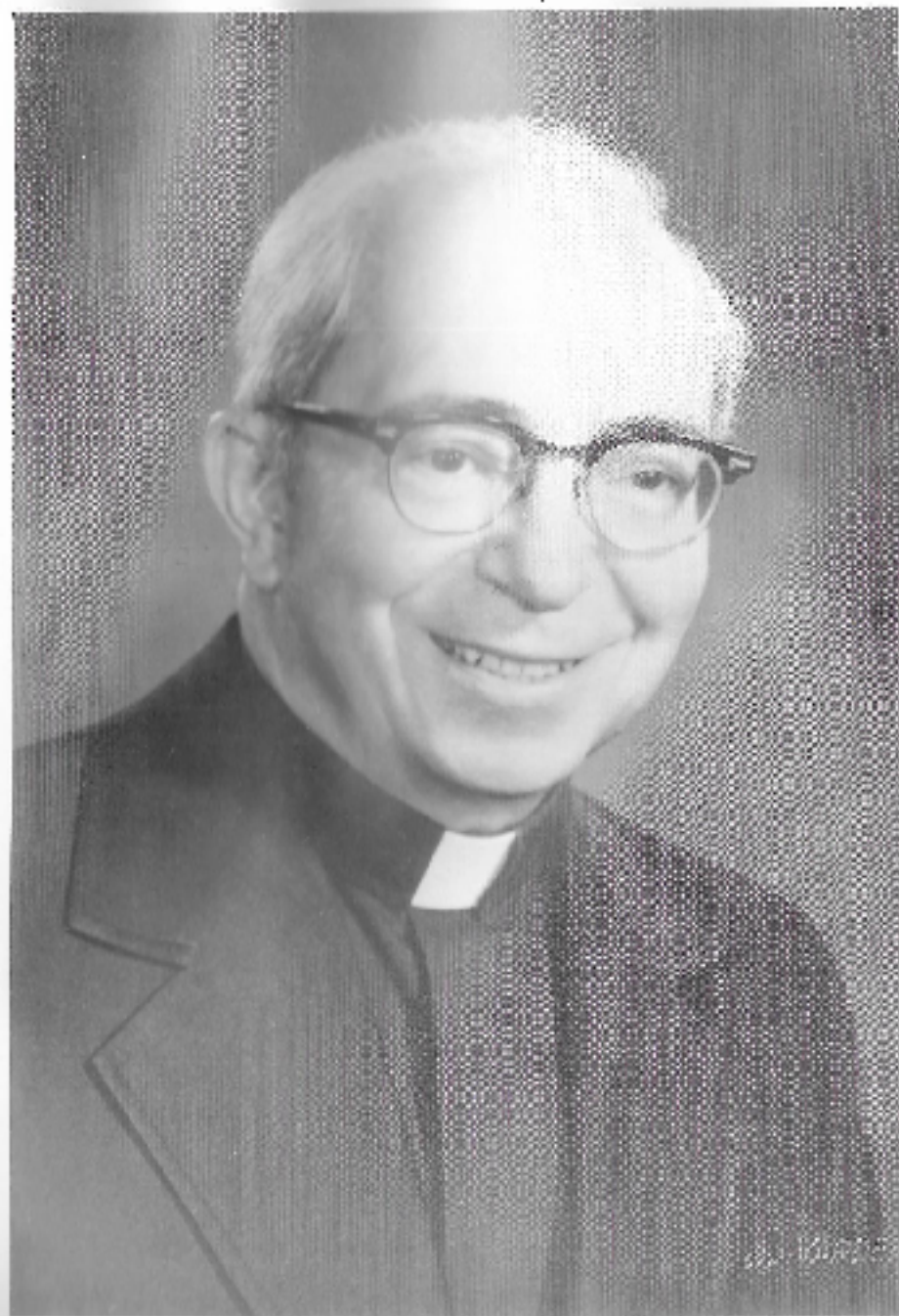
1950 - 1975

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FATHER FRANCIS A. KLEEHAMMER

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Father Francis A. Kleehammer, the founding pastor of St. Rita's parish was born in Rochester, the son of Frank and Elizabeth Kleehammer. He was educated in Holy Redeemer School, St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries. He was ordained on June 10, 1933.

His first appointment was to St. Andrew's parish in Rochester which was built on the site of the Kleehammer Farm, owned by Father's cousins. After four years he was assigned to St. Peter and Paul in Rochester where he remained for six years. His next appointment was to St. Michael's parish in Rochester where he remained for seven years until the founding of St. Rita's in 1950.

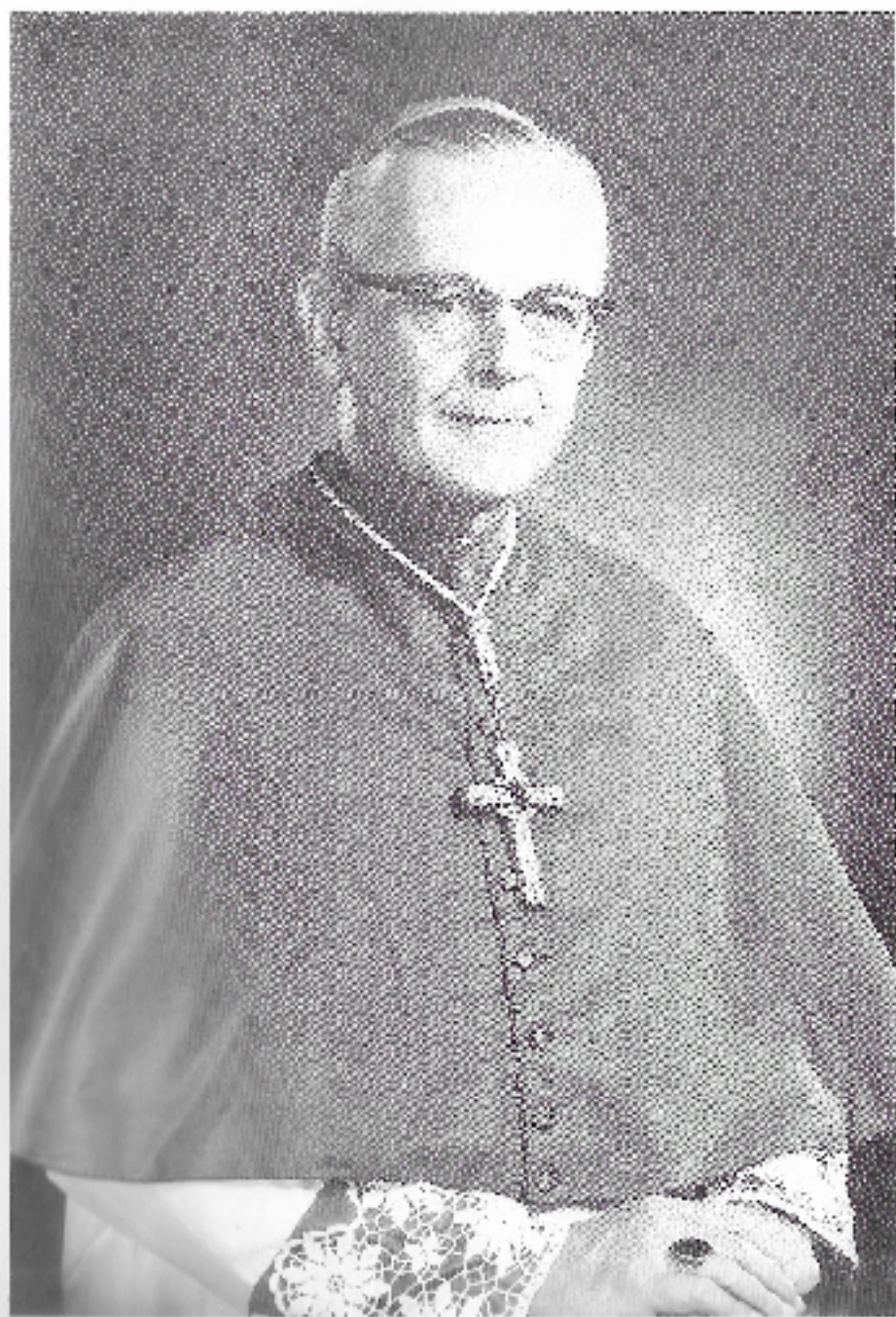
On May 18, 1958 St. Rita's people, adults and school children, joined with Father to celebrate his Silver Jubilee with a program and reception at Bay Road School. A solemn High Mass on June 8, 1958 completed the celebration.



FATHER JAMES T. WOLFE
Appointed to St. Rita's February, 1968



MOST REVEREND JAMES E. KEARNEY, D.D.
Bishop of Rochester 1937-1966



MOST REVEREND JOSEPH HOGAN
Bishop of Rochester 1969



West Webster Builds A Catholic Church

In The Beginning

The scattered Catholic families in the West Webster area had been official members of the Holy Trinity Parish in Webster since Bishop John Timon, C.M., of Buffalo granted permission to a small group of German and Irish families to establish the church in Webster in 1858. Early Catholics in the area attended the Redemptorist Church of Saint Joseph in Rochester, and probably continued to do so for many years after 1858. In 1868 the Diocese of Rochester was created and Webster became a part of this jurisdiction.

During the decades that followed, roads were improved and a railway (Rochester andodus Bay) was built. The West Webster area grew slowly and the Catholic population increased even more slowly. Although Holy Trinity Church was their parish, as time passed many in the western part of the town found it more convenient to attend Saint Salome's Church in Sea Breeze or Saint Ambrose Church on Empire Boulevard in Rochester.

St. Rita's Church Begins

During the 1930's and particularly the post-war 1940's the West Webster area grew rapidly and a logical time had arrived to establish a new Catholic church to serve the needs of the locality. In

February 1950, through the combined efforts of the late Father George M. Kalb, pastor of Holy Trinity Church, and the late Father Arthur F. Florack, pastor of St. Michael's Church, Rochester, the Diocese of Rochester began negotiations for the purchase of twenty-three acres of land, generally located at the corner of Maple Drive and Ridge Road. The land was owned by the estate of the late Raymond Martin and consisted of frontage on Maple Drive and two pieces of frontage on Ridge Road. On it was a small grape vineyard, some fruit trees, and a barn with living quarters attached. This was to become St. Rita's!

Father Francis Kleehammer was asked by the Chancery Office to take a census of the area in March 1950. The tentative boundaries of the proposed parish extended from Irondequoit Bay to Hurd Road and from Lake Ontario south to Embury Road. The area included about 200 Catholic families.

All the Catholic people of the area were invited to attend meetings to be held in the barn on the newly acquired property and the building quickly became known as the "Barn", a name which has endured twenty-five years of use. A target date for completion of a church was set, with the first Mass to be celebrated in September of that year. The magnitude of the task seemed impossible. Father Florack, much interested in the establishment of this new parish, asked that it be named St. Rita's after the saint known as the "Saint of the Impossible". Father Francis A. Kleehammer was named pastor in June 1950. Mr. Harold Ryan and Mr. William Wheeler were the first trustees.

Application was made to the Webster Zoning Board for permission to build the church, and through their wise advice, decision was made to build the church on Maple Drive, with access to parking from two entrances on Ridge Road.

Early in 1950, St. Margaret Mary's parish had dedicated a new church in Irondequoit, and their original church was to be demolished. Through the cooperation of Father Charles Bruton, their pastor, the building was given to the new St. Rita's parish, and the efforts of the men from St. Michael's Church and from West Web-

ster, saw the building carefully taken apart in Irondequoit and rebuilt at its present site. Mr. Philip Winkler, a member of St. Michael's parish, was engaged as architect and the present building was ready for first Mass on September 9, 1950. A fine building ready for use in five months! A tribute to the "Saint of the Impossible".

This accomplishment was also a tribute to the faith, hard work and dedication of the nucleus that was to become St. Rita's Parish. A community of faith began with Father Francis A. Kleehammer as pastor, friend, and advisor.

Father Arthur F. Florack offered the first Mass at St. Rita's Church at 8:30 on September 3, 1950. Father Kleehammer offered the second Mass at 10:30. The Most Reverend James E. Kearney dedicated the church at 8:00 on September 24, and offered the Mass at 8:30. This was to be his first of many official visits to St. Rita's during his tenure as Bishop of the Diocese of Rochester. Attending the dedication on this cold fall morning were Fathers Arthur Florack, George Kalb, Eugene Calinane and John Maney. Breakfast was served the Bishop and visiting priests at the Barn.

The first Sunday of worship also records the baptism of Mark Douglas Saunders, the son of Murray A. Saunders and Doris Klein Saunders, the first of hundreds of children to be baptized in St. Rita's Church.

The funeral of William Mattern took place December 18, 1950; Mrs. Rose Clark, a charter member of St. Rita's Society, on February 13, 1951, the first of scores to follow. *Requiescat in pace!*

The earliest First Communion at St. Rita's took place on Sunday, June 3, 1951 with about twenty-five children in the class. The First Confirmation with Bishop James E. Kearney officiating took place November 30, 1950. Stuart Rauber, son of Elsie and Harry Rauber was the first child to receive the sacrament that day.

During the spring of 1951 construction began for St. Rita's rec-

logy. To be near his people, Father Kleehammer lived in the church in a room behind the altar. His first home in West Webster, despite discomforts and inconveniences was to be a happy one, a home most vivid in his memory. The rectory was completed and occupied on July 31, 1951. Open house for the parishioners followed September 9, 1951.

Major refurbishing in 1971 in the church included new pews and complete carpeting. Preceding this was the new altar suggested by Vatican II. New lighting in 1975 completed the interior updating.

Funding, always a difficult necessity, began with the meetings of the nucleus of the proposed parish in early spring of 1950, at which initial funding was discussed and initiated. Since that time, in dozens of ways, funding has always been possible through the imagination and sacrifice of these early parishioners and of those who were to follow. Holy Trinity Church parishioners aided early in 1951 with a gift of \$85.60 to encourage the development of our new facility.

Through the years, supplementing the usual offerings, the people of St. Rita's sponsored many fund raising activities. On February 2, 1951 a card party at the Barn attracted over 400 people. Many of the fund raising projects also created a social atmosphere, in which St. Rita's people could become acquainted, and in many cases formed friendships which have endured through the years. Dances were held for a number of years, starting in March 1951. The first of many semi annual ham suppers was held on May 26, 1951. On May 24, 1952, nine hundred and six people were served ham dinners in a two and one half hour period, through the cooperation of the women of St. Rita's Society, the Holy Name Society and other ambitious people of our parish. The succeeding years saw Country Fairs, November Bazaars, Christmas Bazaars, Turkey Parties, home card parties, the inevitable bingo in 1952 for several years and resumed again in 1974, the recently innovated Sunday morning breakfasts, the occasional spaghetti and corned-beef dinners, and, by far the most extensive - the annual St. Rita's Fiesta, now in its twenty-second year. Many of the senior members of our parish will recall the "Grecian Gold and Calypso Cream" or "Arctic White and Tropical Coral" automobiles which delighted Father Kleehammer



when he reminded people of the first Fiestas in 1955 and 1956. There were other means to accomplish the "difficult necessity", such as home card parties to purchase equipment for the Barn kitchen, or the fashion shows sponsored by St. Rita's Society. Father Kleshammer's perhaps not original slogan during the early years, was "Join the Dollar a Sunday Club". These endeavors combined produced tremendous results.

Social life at St. Rita's was fostered by the organization of the St. Rita's Society and the St. Rita's Holy Name Society on January 9, 1951 and January 11, 1951 respectively. The St. Rita's Society remains a viable organization today; changing life-styles and needs saw the demise of the Holy Name Society in 1970. A history of St. Rita's Society is included elsewhere.

Around these two organizations a parish social life was built through the years. A garden club was active for a number of years. Boy and Girl Scouts were sponsored. Red Cross and First-Aid classes were conducted. Rug hooking, sewing, canning, and other arts and crafts instructions were conducted at the Barn. A Women's Bowling League has been in existence for many years. The Altar Society, formed in 1961 has had an important responsibility through these many years. The Youth Sodality was formed in 1951 and continued in operation for about ten years and revived most recently by the lately organized YTC (Youth That Cares).

The Barn has contributed much to the social and educational aspect of St. Rita's Church. It has been a meeting place for the societies, for church and community sponsored groups and at one time for the organization of another Christian church in our community. For many years the Barn had served as an election district polling place. Here also the parish picnics, held intermittently since August 12, 1951 have taken place, as also the early Christmas parties for the children. Since 1964 the upstairs of the Barn has been used as the library for St. Rita's School.

As a Community of faith, St. Rita's Church must be proud. In its early years, the annual St. Rita's Novena was attended by people from all over the area, even those outside the Catholic faith. In 1951

there were four novenas conducted, the last ending in late fall. St. Rita's Feast Day has been observed with a triduum in recent years. Many parishioners will recall the blessing of St. Rita's roses and the announced petitions and answers to many prayers directed to our patron saint. Frequently during each year announcements are made public from the pulpit acknowledging a prayer answered through petition to St. Rita, the "Saint of the Impossible."

The faith of St. Rita's people is recorded in the Prayer Hours for Peace, Day of Prayer and Concern, Masses for Peace and other announced services. But most of the faith here, as everywhere, is in the heart, known only to God. Providing assistance at masses through all the years, there has been, depending on the current leadership and talent, an adult choir, a male choir, children's choir, Folk Singers, and other choral groups. Mrs. Gerry Elliott has served as church organist for twenty-five years. On May 2, 1976 a reception was held to recognize her contributions.

Of the first trustees of St. Rita's Church, Harold Ryan, also the Holy Name Society's first president, passed away in February 1960. William Wheeler, known as "Pa" died in October 1963. Among St. Rita's parishioners are many men and women who served our country since World War I. The first war casualty was Corporal Mortimer Miller, killed in Korea August 24, 1952. Corporal Miller's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Miller were among the first members of St. Rita's and Mortimer assisted in the removal of St. Margaret Mary's Church to the West Webster site in 1950. The statue of St. Rita was donated by Mortimer's parents in his memory. Another young man from St. Rita's to die in the service of our country was Specialist 3rd Class Raymond Foti, son of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Foti. He was a nuclear technician aboard the U.S. Navy atomic submarine Thresher, sunk April 10, 1963 in the North Atlantic, one of 129 men.

Not all was or ever is serious at St. Rita's. Preceding the first card party on February 2, 1951 the area experienced an unusual warm spell. Since there was no paved area near the Barn to provide parking, Father Kleshammer asked for prayers for the weather to normalize during the days preceding February 2nd. The heavenly response was so great that the weather plummeted to record lows all over north-eastern United States.

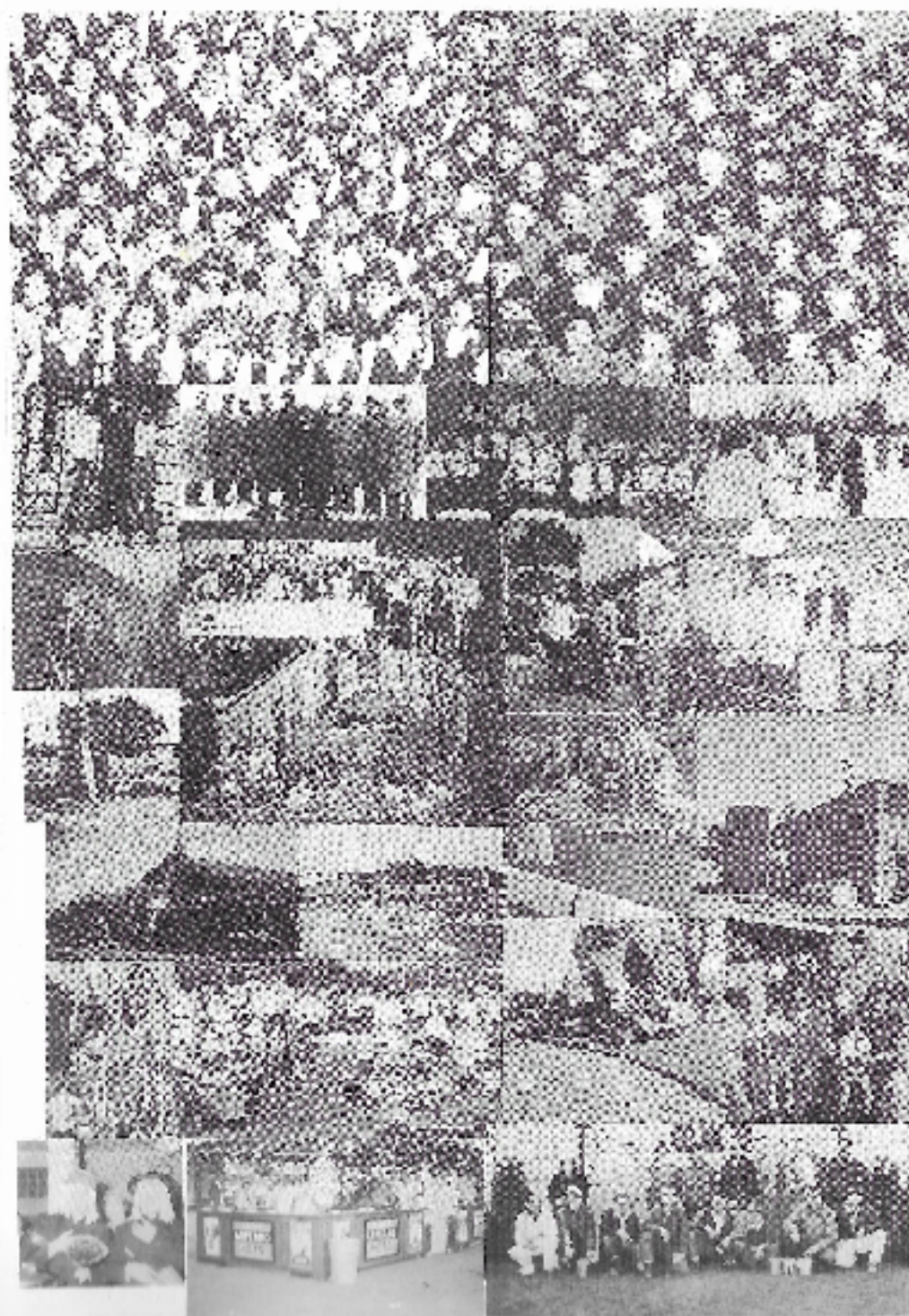
The Clothing Drives for the Needy (Bishop's Relief) have always been met with unusual response. The first in 1951 five hundred sixty-eight pounds of clothing was collected, and at that time was sent to a collection depot downstate. The committee determined that parcel post was the simplest and most direct way to ship. Our then small-town West Webster post office was jammed with over 40 bundles. The truck which held the contract for West Webster pulled in, loaded to the tailgate with holiday mail. Some of St. Rita's shipment was loaded aboard; other packages waited until the next pick-up. Each year the total poundage increased, peaking one year at 8,618 pounds! shipped by truck each year after 1951.

In 1962, a Fiesta ticket purchaser, Walter Hanratty of Daytona Avenue put his dog's name on a car raffle ticket. On Saturday night, Tippy won a car. Mr. William Adams, news programmer for WHEC-TV broadcast the news—a dog the owner of a new Chevrolet. Associated Press wirephoto picked it up and the unusual was published in newspapers around the country. Many people from far and wide sent our pastor clippings from their local newspapers.

Humorous and practical was the first donation received for St. Rita's Church. Father Klehammer purchased the New York Times each week from a local store in the neighborhood where he was assigned. Mention was made of the proposed new church and the vendor gave him a substantial donation. The news store was the front for a horseroom.

Our people are always ready to assist whenever the appeals for help go out. The parish buildings have been painted several times by our people. When the appeal goes out, volunteers sign their intention to work on a card. Perhaps the most impressive signer was I. Brushwell in July 1971.

Our church was never intended, nor could it be, an island in the middle of West Webster. St. Rita's Church is an associate member of the Webster Council of Churches and participates in the annual University of Life Ecumenical Series in Webster. Many parishioners are members of the FISH organization, of Meals on Wheels, and other activities which contribute time and money to community social endeavors.



A great contribution to the spiritual and the temporal at St. Rita's has been the dedication of the assistant pastors, first of whom was Father O'Connell, appointed in 1954; followed by Fathers Connolly, Watts, Erb, Burr and Wolfe. A list of their tenures will be found elsewhere.

Another contribution to the spiritual and secular well-being at St. Rita's has been the Parish Council, established October 2, 1967. Lay participation, suggested by teachings of Vatican II, removed some of the burden of parish administration from the pastor and provided input from members of the parish to aid in the spiritual and material development of the parish. Since that time many men and women have given generously of their time and talents toward these ends.

Continued growth in Webster and northern Penfield made necessary a division of Holy Trinity and St. Rita's parishes. In 1965, Holy Spirit Church was built at Hatch and Plank Roads, and two years later St. Paul's Church was established on Hard Road. This division took many families from St. Rita's parish, among them charter members and enthusiastic contributors to many of St. Rita's programs.

In 1976 we count about 1200 families in our membership. St. Rita's exists where there was only the faith of a few people twenty-five years ago.

St. Rita's School

The parish grew rapidly in the early 1950's. For the first three years of operation, St. Rita's school children were accepted at Holy Trinity School. They too, were experiencing rapid growth. In 1954 it became evident that consideration must be given to building a school at St. Rita's. First announcement of a proposed ten room school was made on February 7, 1954. A drive, completed June 20, 1954, produced \$140,169. A supplemental drive at the end of 1954 to include newcomers totaled \$16,500 more. Bids were let in late October 1954. Groundbreaking took place at 11:33 on December 5th. The

school was opened September 12, 1955 with a Mass at 9:00. Bishop James E. Kearney dedicated the building on October 30, 1955 at 4:00 p.m. followed by open house.

The new school was staffed by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, who have handled the administration of the school since that time. The first faculty consisted of four Sisters of Mercy and six lay teachers. The early 1960's recorded the maximum registration of 804 students. During the past eight years, the registration has averaged 406 students per year. At the present time, staff consists of five Sisters of Mercy and eleven lay teachers.

When the Sisters of Mercy came to West Webster, a residence was established on Ridge Road, adjoining St. Rita's School property. The Sisters used this as a convent from August 1965 until 1968. Additional convent residence was provided for a time at the home owned by the parish on Maple Drive north of the rectory.

The first graduation took place on June 21, 1956. By 1958 St. Rita's School was the sixth largest school in the Diocese. Many honors have been conferred on the school and its teachers and students. In 1968 St. Rita's Civic Club rated 4th among 5000 competing clubs by the Commission of American Citizenship of the Catholic University, Washington, D.C.

Continual growth of the parish overloaded the St. Rita's School. It was necessary to use the upper and lower floors of the Barn and a room in the rear of the Church for classrooms. In 1959 a successful drive was conducted for a school addition of seven rooms and a convent. The school addition was ready for occupancy in September 1960. The convent was occupied by the sisters in August 1966.

The first principal of St. Rita's School was Sister Mary Ellen. She was succeeded by Sister Mary Maurice and then by Sister Mary Vincent who is the present administrator.

A viable religious education program for primary and

secondary students and for adults is conducted by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), a lay organization, made up of trained personnel who are St. Rita's parishioners. Thousands of hours have been given by many people to create a religious awareness to many hundreds of youths and adults over more than two decades. At the present time all CCD programs are coordinated by Sister Mary Noel who is pastoral assistant of our parish. Sister Noel celebrated her silver anniversary in the Mercy Order with a reception in her honor May 2, 1976.

St. Rita's Society

St. Rita's Society

The first meeting of the St. Rita's Society was held January 9, 1951 with 54 women in attendance. With the parish only four months old the Society was formed to draw the women of the new parish together for spiritual and social events.

In its early days, the Society also had the monumental task of organizing the women of our infant parish to raise money for the myriad of supplies a new parish needs. Through the women's tremendous efforts much has been accomplished in the Society's 25 years of existence.

Over these 25 years, the Society has had good, strong, Christian leadership and has always been an exemplary group. Loretta "Ma" Wheeler served as the Society's first President from January 1951 to December 1952. She along with Vice President - Inez Ryan, Secretary - Ruth Yuczer and Treasurer - Mary Stumpf, served as the leaders during the first two difficult formative years. These women along with many regulars served as the backbone of the Society as well as of the parish.

From its humble beginnings of 54 members, the group grew to 188 members by September 1954. Through the fifties and sixties membership was high and very active but as the seventies came, active membership in the Society has dropped somewhat.

The Society has proved itself a leader in the spiritual life of the parish. In its early years members received communion monthly in a

body, but as frequent communion became more common among all parishioners, monthly group communion was discontinued. However, yearly group communion followed by a Communion Breakfast has continued. The Society for many years fostered devotion to St. Rita and helped purchase roses for the special devotion on her feast. Later, it began the Evening With Mary in 1969 as a special tribute to the Blessed Virgin each May. From 1967 through 1971, Bishop James E. Kearney was guest speaker at these May devotions. A yearly Day of Remembrance has been another of their spiritual endeavors. A mass is offered yearly for all babies born during the year in the parish.

From 1959 to 1972, the Society contributed both volunteers and a sizable amount of money each year to support the parish catechetical program. Members have supported and encouraged many Christian endeavors. They were active in Operation Moral, ran clothing drives, for many years contributed to Mt. Carmel in the form of money and goods, supplied volunteers for Hill Haven, worked and contributed to Newark State School, supported Holy Angel's Home and provided a guard of honor for deceased members.

Besides their strong participation in helping others, the Society members know how to have a good time. In 1957 members formed a bowling league, still functioning. Each year since 1956, the women have had a Turken Supper in September. The Society held a gala Christmas Party at local restaurants from 1951 to 1969. Since 1970, their parties have been held in the Barn where they welcome all women of the parish to join in the fun. Also since 1970, the St. Patrick's party has become a very successful annual event. Their other get-togethers include a yearly picnic, an occasional Halloween Party, Splash party and once a Valentine Dance. The Society was also instrumental in beginning the annual Parish Dinner Dance which is open to all parishioners. Members warmly welcome all women of the parish at their meetings which include speakers, demonstrations and workshops.

One of the Society's biggest and perhaps least known function is to assist the priests and sisters in a material way. Through the years, society members have raised thousands of dollars for extras and sometimes necessities. In 1951 the Society held the first Ham Sup-

per to raise money for kitchen supplies. These suppers were a tradition for many years. The women held card parties, raffles, baked food sales, Fashion shows, sold cards and stationery and showed Saturday afternoon movies to raise money. Members man the kitchen and hold the baked food sale at each Fiesta. Since the school opened in 1955 the Society has held showers for the nuns and still continues to give the nuns money each September to stock their pantry. The single, most successful endeavors to raise money were the Christmas Bazaars of 1971 and 1972. The first bazaar netted over \$1200 and the second over \$1800. In 1972 \$1500 of this was presented to Father Kleehammer to help pay for the new kitchen at the Barn. In 1967, the Society made up a St. Rita's Cookbook to exchange recipes and made a profit of about \$800.

Through its 25 years, the St. Rita's Society has played a very important role in the parish. It was the fore-runner of today's Human Development Committee with objectives directed toward Christian charity. Within the parish, its financial assistance has been a tremendous help. Today's committees still capture the Christian camaraderie which has made St. Rita's Society so successful. May the Society continue to play an important role in parish life and flourish for another 25 years.

**Assistant Pastors
Assigned to St. Rita's Church**

Rev. Richard C. O'Connell
June 29, 1954 to February 14, 1961

Rev. John A. Connolly
June 30, 1959 to December 1, 1961

Rev. Thomas H. Watts
February 14, 1961 to June 29, 1965

Rev. Francis J. Erb
December 2, 1961 to February 14, 1968

Rev. Thomas W. Burr
June 29, 1965 to June 25, 1970

Rev. James T. Wolfe
February 14, 1968

**VOCATIONS FROM ST. RITA'S
1951-1976**

Sisterhoods from St. Rita's Parish

SISTER PATRICIA FLASS
Sisters of St. Joseph

SISTER AUDREY HUNT
Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement

SISTER MARCIA KUSSE
Sisters of Mercy

SISTER ANITA PAYCOFF
Sisters of Mercy

SISTER KATHRYN WAHL
Sisters of Mercy

Vocations to Priesthood

REV. DOUGLAS HOFFMAN
Ordained December 21, 1967

REV. ROBERT RICE
Ordained May 13, 1972

REV. PAUL RYAN
Ordained April 6, 1973

ST. RITA'S SILVER JUBILEE YEAR 1975-1976

October 5, 1976	Bishop Joseph Hogan officiated at Jubilee Solemn Mass at 12:30 p.m.
November	Latin mass in memory of deceased parishioners and relatives and friends of present parishioners
January 1976	Party of Knights of Columbus Center in Webster
February	Successful Blood Donor program
March	Children performance in the school, directed by Sister Noel and Sister Vincent. Held three evenings to accommodate the large number of interested parishioners and friends.
April	Dinner dance at Hospitality House with excellent response.
May	Tridium to St. Rita with a Day with Mary on Ascension Day
June	Fiesta
July	Church picnic at Webster Park
August	Baseball night at Silver Stadium West Webster Appreciation night
September	Closing Ceremony

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 Yaeger, Mr. & Mrs. Arthur
 Yauchai, Mr. & Mrs. Harold
 Zimmer, Mrs. Edward L.

In Memoriam

Annis, Mrs. J.
 Auburger, Andrew
 Ayers, William A.
 Bartold, Robert
 Bates, Lillian A.
 Bayor, Walter
 Berdel Family
 Bowles, Gifford G.
 Castello Family
 Farnung, John C.
 Flahley, Mr. & Mrs. Charles
 Flugler Family
 Fouquet, Norbert C.
 Gianuso, Ronald A.
 Hakman, Mrs. Eleanor
 Henley, Donald
 Hoffman, Leroy R.
 Klehammer, Frank & Elizabeth
 Kohl, Patricia Ann Lyboldt
 Kronson, Martin
 Kubiak, Joseph S.
 Lanson, Patricia Jane
 Lyboldt, Thomas James
 McNamara, Edmund E. & Mary
 Meyer, Aloysius E.
 Mielcarek, S.
 Mulligan, Harriet C.
 Nadig, Henry
 O'Brien, Smith & Marie C.
 Platten Family
 Pollock, Catherine Anne
 Provenzano, Gary
 Ryan, Joseph P.
 Stumpf, John Alan
 Stumpf, Mary
 Valazza Family
 Watson, Leona
 Welch, Henry
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 Weterings, Aloysius
 Wheeler, Mr. & Mrs. William G.
 Wolfe Family
 Wright, C. Brandon



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